Personality Theories and Assessment

Brief Chapter Outline

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Detailed Chapter Outline

**Personality** is a person’s internally based characteristics of acting and thinking.

*Introducing the Psychoanalytic Approach to Personality*
Marianne Miserandino (1994) presented a way to stimulate discussion of psychoanalytic theory. She presented 15 statements with which students indicate their extent of agreement. You can have your students respond to some or all of these items to begin discussion of this material.
Please give your opinions about the following statements, using this response range:

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

1. Events that occurred during childhood have no effect on one’s personality in adulthood.
2. Sexual adjustment is easy for most people.
3. Culture and society have evolved as ways to curb human beings’ natural aggressiveness.
4. Little boys should not become too attached to their mothers.
5. It is possible to deliberately “forget” something too painful to remember.
6. People who chronically smoke, eat, or chew gum have some deep psychological problem.
7. Competitive people are no more aggressive than noncompetitive people.
8. Fathers should remain somewhat aloof to their daughters.
9. Toilet training is natural and not traumatic for most children.
10. The phallus is a symbol of power.
11. A man who dates a woman old enough to be his mother has problems.
12. There are some women who are best described as being “castrating bitches.”
13. Dreams merely replay events that occurred during the day and have no deep meaning.
14. There is something wrong with a woman who dates a man who is old enough to be her father.
15. A student who wants to postpone an exam by saying, “My grandmother lied . . . er, I mean died,” should probably be allowed the postponement.

Note to Teacher: Items 1, 2, 7, 9, 13, and 15 should be reverse-coded. That is, a response of “1” should be changed to a “5.” A response of “2” should be changed to “4.” A response of “4” should be changed to “2.” A response of “5” should be changed to “1.” Higher total scores (i.e., closer to 75) indicate stronger agreement with psychoanalytic ideas. Lower total scores (i.e., closer to 15) indicate stronger disagreement with psychoanalytic ideas.

Statement 1 deals with general psychosexual development.
Statement 6 deals with the oral state of psychosexual development.
Statement 9 deals with the anal state of psychosexual development.
Statements 4 and 8 deal with the phallic stage of psychosexual development and the Oedipal complex in particular.
Statements 10 and 12 also deal with the phallic state and the notion of penis envy in particular.
Statements 2, 11, and 14 deal with the genital state of psychosexual development.
Statements 3 and 7 deal with the latent death instinct manifested as aggression.
Statement 5 deals with repression.
Statement 13 deals with dream symbolism.
Statement 15 deals with the notion of Freudian slips.

I. The Psychoanalytic Approach to Personality

The psychoanalytic approach was developed by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century. Although it ceased to be of major therapeutic importance after Freud’s death in 1939, it remains an important influence in Western culture.

A. Freudian Classical Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality

Freud received a medical degree and established a practice as a clinical neurologist treating patients with emotional disorders. He believed sex was a primary cause of emotional problems, and sex was a critical component of his personality theory.

1. Freud’s three levels of awareness are analogous to an iceberg, of which only a small portion is visible above the water (refer to Figure 8.1).
   a. The conscious mind is the visible tip above the surface—what people are currently aware of, what people are thinking about right now.
   b. The part of the iceberg just beneath the surface is the preconscious mind—what is stored in memory that people are not currently aware of but can gain access to.
   c. The unconscious mind is the part of the mind that people cannot become aware of. However, it contains the primary motivations for all actions and feelings—biological instinctual drives (such as for food and sex) and repressed unacceptable thoughts, memories, and feelings, especially unresolved conflicts from early childhood.

2. Freud’s three-part personality structure comprises three mental processes or systems rather than actual physical structures.
   a. The id is the original personality, the only part present at birth and the part from which the other two parts of personality emerge. The id resides in the unconscious mind. It includes biological instinctual drives, the primitive parts of personality located in the unconscious: life instincts (for survival, reproduction, and pleasure) and death instincts (destructive and aggressive drives detrimental to survival). The id operates on the pleasure principle; that is, it demands immediate gratification for these drives without concern for the consequences of gratification.
   b. During the first year or so of life, the ego starts finding realistic and socially acceptable outlets for the id’s needs. The ego operates on the reality principle, finding gratification for instinctual drives within the constraints of reality (the norms and laws of society). It serves as the executive manager of the personality. Part of the ego is unconscious (tied to the id) and part of the ego is conscious and preconscious (tied to the external world).
   c. The superego represents one’s conscience and idealized cultural standards of behavior. It operates on a morality principle, threatening to overwhelm people with guilt and shame.

Worth Video Anthology for Introductory Psychology: Personality Structure: Id, Ego, and Superego (5:30)

This video provides a unique dramatization of conflicts between the ego (which functions on the reality principle), the id (representing primitive aggressive and sexual drives), and the superego (representing a restrictive moral code). The video illustrates how the id and the superego pressure a young man in two situations: a conflict with an employer and a dinner date. The narrator explains how, according to Freud’s theory, the ego is challenged to reconcile the conflicting demands of the id and the superego but still maintain its identity.

3. The demands of the superego and the id sometimes come into conflict, and the ego has to resolve the turmoil within the constraints of reality. To prevent being overcome with anxiety because of trying to satisfy the id and superego demands, the ego uses what Freud called defense mechanisms, processes that distort reality and protect us from anxiety. Freud identified eight common defense mechanisms (see Table 8.1).
a. The primary defense mechanism is **repression**, unknowingly placing an unpleasant memory or thought in the unconscious so that people are not anxious about it.
b. **Regression** is reverting to immature behavior from an earlier stage of development.
c. **Denial** is refusing to acknowledge anxiety-provoking realities.
d. **Displacement** is redirecting unacceptable feelings from the original source to a safer substitute target.
e. **Sublimation** is replacing socially unacceptable impulses with socially acceptable behavior.
f. **Reaction formation** is acting in exactly the opposite way to one’s unacceptable impulses.
g. **Projection** is attributing one’s own unacceptable feelings and thoughts to others rather than oneself.
h. **Rationalization** is creating false excuses for one’s unacceptable feelings, thoughts, or behavior.

Unhealthy personalities develop not only when people become too dependent on defense mechanisms, but also when the id or superego is unusually strong or the ego is unusually weak.

4. Freud’s psychosexual stage theory was developed chiefly from his own childhood memories and from his years of interactions with his patients and their case studies that included their own childhood memories.

An **erogenous zone** is the area of the body where the id’s pleasure-seeking psychic energy is focused during a particular stage of psychosexual development. A change in erogenous zones designates the beginning of a new stage.

**Fixation** occurs when a portion of the id’s pleasure-seeking energy remains in a stage because of excessive gratification or frustration of our instinctual needs. Fixation can continue throughout a person’s life and affect behavior and personality traits.

Freud identified five psychosexual stages (see Table 8.2).

a. In the **oral stage** (birth to 18 months), the erogenous zones are the mouth, lips, and tongue, and children derive pleasure from oral activities such as sucking, biting, and chewing.
b. In the **anal stage** (from about 18 months to 3 years), the erogenous zone is the anus, and children derive pleasure from having and withholding bowel movements. Parents try to get children to develop self-control during toilet training. If children react to harsh toilet training by trying to get even with the parents by withholding bowel movements, an **anal-retentive personality** with the traits of orderliness, neatness, stinginess, and obstinacy develops. An **anal-expulsive personality** develops when children rebel against the harsh training and have bowel movements whenever and wherever they desire.
c. In the **phallic stage** (from age 3 to 6 years), the erogenous zone is the genitals, and children derive pleasure from genital stimulation.

In the **Oedipus conflict**, a little boy becomes sexually attracted to his mother and fears the father (his rival) will find out and castrate him. In the Electra conflict, a little girl is attracted to her father because he has a penis; she wants one and feels inferior without one (penis envy).

In the process of **identification**, children adopt the characteristics of the same-sex parent and learn the parent’s gender role (the set of behaviors expected of someone of a particular sex). During identification, the superego begins to develop.
d. In the **latency stage of psychosexual development** (from about age 6 to puberty), there is no erogenous zone. Sexual drives become less active, and the focus is on cognitive and social development.
e. In the **genital stage of psychosexual development** (from puberty through adulthood), the erogenous zone is again the genitals, and the person develops normal heterosexual relationships in the process of moving toward adult sexual relationships.
5. Psychologists have evaluated several aspects of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality. Freud’s notion of an “unconscious” level of awareness is not accessible and is thus impossible to examine or test scientifically. Unconscious information processing does affect our thinking and behavior, but the unconscious is not a storehouse of instinctual drives, conflicts, and repressed memories and desires.

Although early childhood experiences are important, there is little evidence for Freud’s psychosexual stages affecting development. But there is evidence for the importance of many of the concepts that were discussed in the developmental chapter.

Contemporary researchers think repression seldom, if ever, really occurs. Psychologists now understand how Freud’s questioning during therapy may have created “repressed” memories in his patients.

There is evidence that people fight hard to maintain self-esteem, but do not necessarily do so through defense mechanisms as Freud described them.

Scientific American Introductory Psychology Videos: Psychodynamic Theories of Personality (9:00)
This video offers an excellent summary of various theories of personality. It includes amusing examples of people acting out various Freudian theories as well as other clips and animations to assist students in understanding how these theories might be applied to their own lives. This video would work well as either an introduction to the topic or as a review of this section within the chapter.

B. Neo-Freudian Theories of Personality
The personality theorists who came after Freud agreed with many of Freud’s basic ideas, but they differed from him in one or more important ways.

1. Carl Jung’s collective unconscious is the accumulated universal experiences of humankind. All human beings inherit the same cumulative storehouse of all human experiences. These experiences are manifested in archetypes, which are images and symbols of all the important themes in the history of humankind (for example, God, mother, hero). The notions of the collective unconscious and archetypes are more mystical than scientific and cannot be empirically tested.

   Jung proposed two main personality attitudes: (1) extraversion, and (2) introversion. He also proposed the following four styles or functions of gathering information. (1) Sensing is the reality function in which the world is carefully perceived. (2) Intuiting is subjective perception. (3) Thinking is logical deduction. (4) Feeling is the subjective emotional function. The two personality attitudes and four functions are the basis for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which is still widely used today.

2. Alfred Adler theorized that people’s main motivation is what he termed “striving for superiority” to overcome the sense of inferiority that is felt by infants, in a totally helpless and dependent state. A healthy person learns to cope with these feelings, becomes competent, and develops a sense of self-esteem. An inferiority complex is the strong feeling of inferiority felt by people who never overcome the initial feeling of inferiority.

3. Karen Horney focused on dealing with our need for security. A child’s caregivers must provide a sense of security for a healthy personality to develop. If they don’t, basic anxiety, a feeling of helplessness and insecurity in a hostile world, results.

   Horney identified three neurotic personality patterns:
   a. Moving toward people—a compliant, submissive person
   b. Moving against people—an aggressive, domineering person
   c. Moving away from people—a detached, aloof person
II. The Humanistic Approach and the Social-Cognitive Approach to Personality

Humanistic theories developed in the 1960s as part of a response to the deterministic psychoanalytic and strict behavioral psychological approaches that dominated psychology and the study of personality at that time. Both psychoanalytic and behavioral approaches stressed that people were not in charge of their behavior and personality development. The humanistic approach emphasizes conscious free will in one’s actions, the uniqueness of the individual person, and personal growth. Social-cognitive theorists rebelled against the narrowness of the strict behavioral approach and emphasized both social and cognitive factors along with conditioning to explain personality development.

A. The Humanistic Approach to Personality

1. Abraham Maslow is considered the father of the humanistic movement. He studied the lives of very healthy and creative people to develop his theory of personality. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is an arrangement of the innate needs that motivate behavior in five levels in a pyramid, from the strongest needs at the bottom to the weakest needs at the top (refer to Figure 8.2). Starting from the bottom, these needs are:
   a. Physiological needs such as food, water, and air;
   b. Safety needs such as being out of danger, feeling safe and secure;
   c. Social needs such as love, belongingness, affection, family relationships, and companionship;
   d. Self-esteem needs such as achievement mastery, being appreciated by others for achievements, and having a positive self-image; and
   e. Self-actualization, which is a growth-based need and is the fullest realization of a person’s potential—becoming all one can be. Characteristics of self-actualized people include accepting themselves, others, and the nature of the world for what they are; having a need for privacy and only a few close, emotional relationships; being autonomous and independent, democratic, and very creative; and having peak experiences, which are experiences of deep insight in which a person experiences an event as fully as possible.

   Maslow’s theory is criticized for being based on nonempirical, vague studies of a small number of people whom he subjectively selected as self-actualized.

2. Carl Rogers is known for his self theory. Rogers was a client-centered therapist who dealt with young, bright college students with adjustment problems and emphasized self-actualization.

   Rogers posited that all people have a strong need for positive regard—to be accepted by and have the affection of others, especially significant others. Parents set up conditions of worth, the behaviors and attitudes for which they will give children positive regard. Meeting conditions of worth continues throughout life, and people develop a self-concept of what others think they should be. This concept may differ from what a person’s ideal self would be.

   Unconditional positive regard is acceptance and approval without conditions. Empathy from others and the genuineness of others about their own feelings is necessary if people are to self-actualize.
Neither Maslow’s nor Rogers’s theory is research-based. Figure 8.3 presents a pictorial summary of Roger’s self theory.

**B. The Social-Cognitive Approach to Personality**

The social-cognitive approach is research-based and combines elements of three major research perspectives (cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural approaches). Proponents of the approach believe that learning through environmental conditioning contributes to personality development and that social learning/modeling and cognitive processes, such as perception and thinking, are also involved and are actually more important to the development of personality than behavioral principles.

1. Bandura’s **self-system** is the set of cognitive processes by which people observe, evaluate, and regulate their social behavior. People consciously choose which behavior to engage in, acting in accordance with their assessment of whether the behavior will be reinforced.

   **Self-efficacy** is a judgment of one’s effectiveness in dealing with particular situations, and it plays a major role in determining behavior. Low self-efficacy is associated with depression, anxiety, and helplessness. High self-efficacy is associated with self-confidence, positive outlook, and minimal self-doubt.

2. In Rotter’s **locus of control theory**, locus of control refers to people’s perception of the extent to which they control what happens to them. **External locus of control** is the perception that chance or an external force beyond people’s control determines their fate. **Internal locus of control** is the perception that people control their own fate.

   People with an internal locus of control perceive their success as dependent on their own needs, but they may or may not feel that they have the competence (efficacy) to bring about successful outcomes in various situations. People with an internal locus of control are psychologically and physically better off than people with an external locus of control.

   External locus of control may contribute to **learned helplessness**, a sense of hopelessness in which people think they are unable to prevent unpleasant events.

3. Self-perception theory emphasizes attributions in understanding how personality develops. In self-perception, **attribution** is the process by which people explain their own behavior and that of others. **Internal attribution** means that people attribute the outcome of their behavior to themselves. **External attribution** means that people attribute the outcome to factors outside themselves.

   **Self-serving bias** is the tendency to make attributions so that people can perceive themselves favorably. If the outcome is positive, people make an internal attribution for it. If the outcome is negative, people make an external attribution for it. Self-serving bias is adaptive because it protects people from falling prey to learned helplessness and depression.
Class Activity: Self-Serving Bias
The text discusses how our attributions about ourselves tend to position us in a favorable light, a phenomenon called self-serving bias. Dunn (1989) describes a simple activity in which students are asked to anonymously write down a list of their strengths and a list of their weaknesses. After class, the instructor tabulates the number of strengths and weaknesses, calculating the mean number of each. An announcement of results at the next class tends to reveal that students report more strengths than weaknesses, suggesting a self-serving bias. The discussion that ensues may extend to potential reasons for the self-serving bias (e.g., to protect self-esteem or as a reflection of how we process or recall information about ourselves).


PsychSim 5 Tutorial: Helplessly Hoping
This relatively short module contains information pertaining to the social-cognitive approach to personality. The roles of personal control and optimism are presented, with visual depiction of Seligman’s experiments on escape and avoidance learning. (The ethics of these experiments are questioned.) Information is presented about sex differences in personal power and personal control and how such facts may be partially responsible for sex differences in depression (women tend to have less power and control and hence higher rates of depression than do men). The module concludes with a presentation of Rodin and Langer’s research on how personal control over one’s environment, in the form of decision-making power, is related to well-being in nursing home residents.

III. Trait Theories of Personality and Personality Assessment

Worth Video Anthology for Introductory Psychology: Personality Traits (3:32)
This video presents an overview of the three major trait theories of personality presented in the text. The importance of both heredity (nature) and the environment (nurture) is stressed. This video could be used to preview or review information in this section of the text.

Personality traits are internal, relatively stable characteristics that define an individual’s personality; traits are continuous dimensions. Trait theorists use factor analysis and other statistical techniques to determine how many basic personality factors (or traits) are needed to describe human personality, as well as what these factors are. Factor analysis identifies clusters of items on a personality test that measure the same factor/trait.

A. Trait Theories of Personality
Each trait is a dimension, a continuum ranging from one extreme of the dimension to the other.
1. Raymond B. Cattell and Hans Eysenck each tried to determine the number and kind of personality traits. Cattell, using factor analysis, found that 16 traits were necessary to describe human personality. Eysenck, also using factor analysis, argued for three primary trait dimensions.

Cattell and Eysenck differed because the number of traits depends on the level of categorization in the factor analysis. Eysenck’s theory is at a more general and inclusive level of abstraction than Cattell’s.

2. The three factors in Eysenck’s three-factor theory are (1) extraversion/introversion (gregariousness and outgoingness versus introversion), (2) neuroticism/emotional stability, and (3) psychoticism/impulse control. Eysenck argued that these traits are determined by heredity.
The biological basis for the extraversion/introversion trait is level of cortical arousal (neuronal activity). Introverts have higher normal levels of arousal than do extraverts, so extraverts need to seek out external stimulation to raise the level of arousal in the brain to a more optimal level.

People who are high on the neuroticism/emotional stability dimension tend to be overly anxious, emotionally unstable, and easily upset because of a more reactive sympathetic nervous system.

The psychoticism/impulse control trait involves one’s degree of aggressiveness, impulsiveness, and empathy. A high level of testosterone and a low level of MAO, a neurotransmitter inhibitor, lead to high levels of psychoticism.

Worth Video Anthology for Introductory Psychology: Personality and the Brain (5:30)
This video dramatically highlights the role of the frontal lobe in personality. It focuses on a man who has been diagnosed with a degenerative brain disorder that, as the man’s wife explains, has greatly diminished her husband’s awareness of the effect of his behavior on other people. As was the case with Phineas Gage (discussed in Chapter 2, Neuroscience), the narrator emphasizes that the frontal lobe plays an important role in temperament and control of social interaction. Interestingly, in this particular case, degeneration has led to the expression of a new ability: painting. The narrator addresses how this new skill raises important unanswered questions about the modular organization of the brain and how perhaps the destruction of an inhibitory area led to the emergence of previously unexpressed artistic ability.

Worth Video Anthology for Introductory Psychology: Genes and Personality: Understanding Williams Syndrome (8:10)
This video further supplements the role of the brain on expression of personality. Specifically, it explores a rare disease called Williams syndrome, with its most striking physical feature being an appealing elfin face. In addition, it is marked by extreme friendliness and sociability toward others. Discussion with a man named Justin illustrates the intellectual limitations of individuals with Williams syndrome. In particular, people with Williams syndrome have difficulties performing visual-spatial tasks, as they tend to focus on the details and not the overall organization. The video concludes with the genetic basis for Williams syndrome, leading researchers to search for the genetic basis for traits such as sociability.

3. The **five-factor model of personality** (see Table 8.3) is similar to Eysenck’s model except for the number of categories. Most recently, research has tended to find that five factors, instead of three, are necessary to better describe human personality.

a. **Openness**—imaginative, independent, broad interests, receptive to new ideas

b. **Conscientiousness**—well-organized, dependable, careful, disciplined

c. **Extraversion**—sociable, talkative, friendly, adventurous

d. **Agreeableness**—sympathetic, polite, good-natured, soft-hearted

e. **Neuroticism**—emotional, insecure, nervous, self-pitying
Student Video Tool Kit for Introductory Psychology: A Happiness Trait? (2:00)
This video focuses on the discovery of a gene that is associated with the presence or absence of neuroticism. With a backdrop of smiling and anxious babies, the video provides insight into biological links to personality. Researcher Dean Hamer explains how the long version of the newly identified gene has an effect similar to Prozac, which, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Neuroscience), promotes a positive mood by blocking the reuptake of serotonin. However, Hamer clarifies that although researchers are confident that this gene is involved in the development of a happy baby, it is highly probable that happiness is also influenced by other genes that have not yet been identified.

These five factors appear to be universal and are consistent from about age 30 to late adulthood. In addition, research has found that the five factors have about a 50 percent heritability rate across several cultures, indicating a strong genetic basis for these traits. The factors are measured using an assessment instrument called the NEO-PI.

It might be helpful to refer students to Table 8.4, which provides a concise but complete summary of the major theoretical approaches to personality.

Homework Assignment/Lecture Enhancer
Marianne Miserandino (2007) presented an assignment that can be used in or out of class to either introduce or review the five-factor model of personality. Specifically, she recommended using the obituary of Johnny Carson (http://timvp.com/obit_johnnycarson.html) to answer the following questions:

1) What can we say about Johnny Carson’s disposition? Was he neurotic or emotionally stable? Extraverted or introverted? Open or conventional? Agreeable or disagreeable? Conscientious or aimless?
2) In other words, based on the evidence presented in the article, where would a personality psychologist place Carson on each of the five dimensions of the five-factor model? On which dimensions would he be particularly high or low?
3) What does the life of Johnny Carson illustrate about the stability and change of human personality? What stayed the same and what changed about him over the course of his life?

Although Carson’s obituary is indeed rich with descriptors, you might consider, depending on the age of your students, using the obituary of a celebrity who is better known to them. For instance, we used Heath Ledger’s obituary and found it to greatly facilitate discussion of the five-factor model. Furthermore, you could, as suggested in another assignment idea at the end of this chapter of the Instructor’s Resource Manual, use this activity to discuss the other theories of personality presented earlier in Chapter 8.


B. Personality Assessment
Personality tests are used primarily to aid in diagnosing people with problems, for counseling, and for making personnel decisions.

1. A personality inventory is designed to measure multiple traits associated with disorders or with normal functioning. Test takers indicate whether a series of questions or statements applies to them; the test administrator assumes that people can and will provide accurate self-reports.

As a means to apply the notion of personality inventories, we suggest using any or all of the three following PowerPoint-based demonstrations, all of which focus on individual differences in stress.
The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is the most widely used personality test in the world, and it has been translated into more than 100 languages. It uses a “True/False/Cannot Say” format for 567 simple statements (e.g., “I like to cook”). The MMPI was originally developed to be a measure of abnormal personality on 10 clinical scales such as depression and schizophrenia. Items were developed and tested to differentiate between groups of people—for example, a representative sample of people suffering a specific disorder and a sample of normal people—on certain dimensions; the two groups generally responded to an item in opposite ways.

The MMPI contains three validity scales, which attempt to detect fake profiles, test takers who are trying to cover up problems, and test takers who are careless in their responses. Its method of test construction leads to good predictive validity for its clinical scales and its objective scoring procedure leads to reliability in interpretation.

Class Activity/Assignment: Psychometrics
For teachers interested in emphasizing psychometrics in this chapter (or in the intelligence section of Chapter 6), there is a brief assignment at the end of Chapter 6 of these Instructor’s Resources to help students learn psychometrics. It can be used either as a traditional homework assignment or as an in-class activity and the basis for discussion.

2. Projective tests contain a series of ambiguous stimuli, such as inkblots, to which test takers respond by describing their perceptions of the stimuli.
   a. The Rorschach Inkblot Test contains 10 symmetric inkblots printed on cards. The examiner goes through the cards and asks test takers to describe inkblots and clarify their responses by identifying the various parts of the inkblots that led to the response. The test assumes that the test takers’ responses are projections of their personal conflicts and personality dynamics. The test is widely used but its reliability and validity have not been demonstrated.
   b. The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) consists of 31 cards, 30 with black-and-white pictures of ambiguous settings. One card is blank. In a typical testing session, only about 10 of the pictures are used. Test takers make up a story for each card they look at (what happened before, what is happening now, what the people are feeling and thinking, and how things will turn out). The test administrator looks for recurring themes in the responses. The reliability and validity of this test have not yet been demonstrated.

Psychology: The Human Experience Teaching Modules
Module 28 (3:59) provides an opportunity to present a “real world” application of the information about traits, personality assessment, and personality inventories in the text. After defining what is meant by “traits,” this module presents a case in which a marine goes into career counseling after 22 years of service. At first the transition seems extreme, but information is presented on the similarities between the two careers and how a personality inventory of tests revealed the similarities. For teachers interested in extending information presented in the text, this module can be used in conjunction with giving students a career assessment test. However, such tests do involve copyright permission expense. If your school has a career services office, you could ask the office’s staff to administer the test to your class. Or, perhaps a career services person would speak with the class about how tests are used in the workplace.
Class Assignment: Film, TV, or Book Character Analysis

One of our favorite assignments in the personality section of the course is to have students watch a contemporary film (on their own) or a clip from a film (in class) and describe the personality of one or more characters in terms of the information presented in the chapter. Additionally, students could choose a character in a TV show or book. We have asked students to present a one- or two-page analysis of one particular character based on an approximately 20-minute film clip. Films that we have found to be particularly helpful with this assignment/activity include The Breakfast Club, Crash, Father of the Bride, Remember the Titans, and Lord of the Flies. For other ideas, you should examine the lists of movies suggested in Chapter 9 (Social Psychology) and Chapter 10 (Abnormal Psychology), and in the Integrative Assignment suggested after Chapter 10. An example of how we have presented this assignment appears below.

Film, TV, or Book Character Analysis

For this assignment, you will analyze the personality of one specific character as that same character would be described by psychologists who favored each of the four approaches: psychoanalytic, humanistic, social-cognitive, and trait. Choose an interesting TV, movie, or book character (a favorite character, or one with a particularly vivid personality) or someone you know (don’t use real name) on whom to focus. For a TV, movie, or book character, write an introductory paragraph that briefly describes the circumstances and plot of the episode, movie, or book. For a person you know, write an introductory paragraph describing the person’s gender, age, occupational status, or general background. Next, indicate how a psychologist favoring each of the four approaches would describe/explain the character’s behavior on each of the items listed. Provide examples to illustrate each of your answers. Write your analyses using complete, grammatical sentences and appropriate paragraphing.

Psychoanalytic approach—Describe:
1) Either strength or weakness of character’s id, ego, AND superego; OR a conflict between these mental systems
2) How character uses at least one defense mechanism (repression, regression, displacement, sublimation, reaction formation, projection, or rationalization)
3) Whether the character exhibits signs of fixation at or unsuccessful resolution of one of the psychosexual stages (oral, anal, phallic, genital)
4) How one of the neo-Freudians (Jung, Adler, or Horney) would describe character

Humanistic approach —Describe:
1) The position of character on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
2) To what extent character is striving to fulfill potential
3) To what extent and in what situations character receives positive regard from others, or why the character does not receive positive regard
4) To what extent the character’s self-concept is consistent with what you perceive as the character’s ideal self

Social-cognitive approach —Describe:
1) An instance in which the character has observed and evaluated the behavior of others, the apparent consequences of that behavior, and whether the character chose to imitate the behavior
2) To what extent the character demonstrates an internal or external locus of control
3) An attribution made by the character for someone else’s behavior, and whether that attribution was internal or external
4) A situation in which either the character or someone with whom the character was interacting displayed self-serving bias
**Trait perspective** — Describe:

1) Where character “fits” on each of Eysenck’s dimensions of extraversion-introversion, neuroticism-emotional stability, and psychoticism-impulse control

2) Where character “fits” on EACH of the Big Five dimensions other than extraversion and neuroticism (openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness)

3) What you would consider to be the character’s most noticeable positive and negative traits

4) To what extent the character’s traits are consistent across situations